

In a Collective Voice: Uncovering the Black Feminist Information Community of Activist-Mothers in Chicago Public Housing, 1955-1970

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ABSTRACT

In 1963, a group of African-American mothers seeking equity of access, voiced to city officials the need for their neighborhood to have a library. One speaker asserted that the lack of access to a library center would hinder community education. The campaign of these women exemplify what Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock (1999) call the tradition that has no name. This research extends the event by examining the Chicago Public Housing communities they inhabit, as an information nexus. The research addresses the questions: How did African-American activist-mothers residing in Douglass area Chicago public housing build information networks to inform activism? and How does the metaphor of voice support activities in community building? This select historical case study, explores the metaphor of voice in the Black feminist tradition (Collins, 1998, 2000) by uncovering information space(s) and providing context to their collective activism.

The theoretical lens is informed by intersections of information and community, social justice, and race and gender. Borrowing from the constant-comparative grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2011; Corbin & Strass, 2008), uncovering collective voice involved an iterative process of deconstructing data through the development of a three-phase, eight-step evidence inquiry and analysis process. Through rigorous analysis, the formulation of the Black Feminist Information Community (BFIC) model emerged with five meta-level themes (Place/Space, Voice, Information, Belief System, and Self and Community Mobilization). The meta-level themes reflect the importance of collectivism, engagement, and voice in community-based activism. The study significance reflects the recognition of the voice of the researcher and the activist-mothers under study. The BFIC model contributes to the information science theoretical landscape by offering a bottom-up view of information space and demonstrating the representation of information in marginalized communities.

TOPICS

social justice; community engagement; specific populations; sociology of information; research methods; archives